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*JFW
 NY
 File: Cong. Weiss
 HFAC*

EO 12356 : DECL: OADR
 TAGS : MOPS, NU, HO
 SUBJ : HONDURAS HELICOPTER INCIDENT

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. FOLLOWING A MEETING BETWEEN CODEL WEISS AND INTERIOR MINISTER BERGE, I WAS ABLE TO HAVE A BRIEF PRIVATE SESSION WITH HIM ON THE SUBJECT OF THE KILLING OF THE AMERICAN AIRMAN IN HONDURAS THIS MORNING. I TOLD HIM THAT ON THE BASIS OF THE INFORMATION I HAD, THE AIRMAN HAD BEEN KILLED WHILE THE HELICOPTER WAS ON THE GROUND AFTER MAKING A FORCED LANDING IN THE TROYES-CIFUENTES ROAD AREA NEAR THE NICARAGUAN BORDER. I TOLD THE COMANDANTE THAT I WAS UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO MAKE THE MOST ENERGETIC PROTEST AGAINST THIS ATTACK, WHICH WE WERE CERTAIN HAD COME FROM NICARAGUAN TERRITORY. I STRESSED THE VERY SERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS THIS INCIDENT COULD HAVE ON U.S. OPINION AND URGED THE FULLEST POSSIBLE INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENT.

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3. BORGE SAID THAT HE HAD ALREADY BEEN IN TOUCH WITH DEFENSE MINISTER ORTEGA WHO, AS YET, HAD NO DETAILS. BORGE, HOWEVER, SPECULATED THAT THE HELICOPTER MIGHT HAVE BEEN FLYING ACROSS NICARAGUAN TERRITORY IN THE TEUTECACINTE AREA. PULLING OUT HIS DAILY INTELLIGENCE BRIEF, HE REFERRED TO A SERIES OF HOSTILE AIR INTRUSIONS IN THE LAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS AND SAID THAT TROOPS ON THE BORDER WERE OBVIOUSLY IN A HIGH STATE OF ALERT AND TENSION. IF INDEED AN AMERICAN HAD BEEN KILLED -- AND HE COULD NOT CONFIRM THAT -- IT WAS NOT BECAUSE THE GRN WAS SEEKING TO KILL AN AMERICAN. IN A STATE OF SOME ANIMATION, HE REPEATEDLY ASKED, "WHAT CAN AN AMERICAN HELICOPTER HAVE BEEN DOING SO CLOSE TO THE BORDER AT THIS TIME?" I REPEATED THAT WHATEVER THE FACTS, WE COULD NOT BUT BE CONCERNED AT THIS ATTACK FROM NICARAGUAN TERRITORY.

4. IN AN EARLIER MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO, I HAD EXPRESSED MY CONCERN ABOUT THE PRELIMINARY REPORTS WHICH I HAD RECEIVED AND URGED THE FULLEST POSSIBLE INVESTIGATION. ALL THE MEMBERS OF CODEL WEISS MADE THE SAME POINT, BOTH TO D'ESCOTO AND BORGE.

5. COMMENT: THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE GRN ARE NOW FULLY SEIZED WITH THIS INCIDENT AND, FROM WHAT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO OBSERVE, ARE ENGAGED IN EXTENSIVE INTERNAL CONSULTATIONS ON WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT. EVEN IF THEY ADMIT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE INCIDENT, ONE REACTION WILL CERTAINLY BE TO POINT TO OTHER RECENT AIR AND NAVAL INCIDENTS INVOLVING THEIR OWN FORCES AND THOSE OF HONDURAS AND/OR THE FDN IN AN EFFORT TO SHIFT THE BLAME.

QUAINTON

END OF MESSAGE

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